

ADDRESSING FINANCIAL CHALLENGES FACED BY SMAW STUDENTS

by:

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While the Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW) strand offers valuable skills and career opportunities for senior high school students and being a class adviser of SMAW for three years, I had seen many students face financial challenges that can hinder their educational journey. The reasons why some of them led to being drop-outs.

While public education is generally free, students may still face fees for specialized programs, materials, and equipment necessary for SMAW training. These costs can be a burden for families with limited income. Common financial challenges start with materials and equipment, transportation costs, and opportunity costs.

SMAW students require specific tools, protective gear, and materials for practice. The costs associated with purchasing this equipment/material can be significant, especially for students from low-income backgrounds. Some equipment were provided by the school but still inadequate. There were also times were students need to buy electrodes and iron bars which are not provided by the school.

Students also need to travel to the school that offer SMAW courses. Transportation expenses can add up, particularly if public transport is limited or if students live far from their schools. This reason sometimes let a student walk 2.2km just to reach the school.

Since most of the SMAW students were from a low-income family some students may need to balance school with part-time jobs to support their families. This can lead to exhaustion and limit the time they can dedicate to their studies and hands-on training.

As a supportive solution, collaborating with local businesses and industries can provide resources for students. Companies might sponsor students by supplying equipment or offering internships that include financial assistance.

Teachers must be oriented on different government agency programs that may help students know any branch of the government that has initiatives aimed at supporting vocational education. Students should be informed about available grants, loans, and subsidies that can ease their financial burdens.

Schools can also establish programs that lend equipment or materials to students in need. Workshops on financial literacy can also help students manage their finances effectively and explore budgeting strategies.

Creating a mentorship program where experienced SMAW professionals guide students can be beneficial. Mentors can offer advice not only on technical skills but also on navigating financial challenges in their education and careers.

Financial challenges should not be a barrier to pursuing a career in welding for SMAW students. By implementing supportive measures, schools, communities, and governments can help alleviate these burdens. Ensuring that all students have access to the resources they need is crucial for fostering a skilled workforce and promoting equity in vocational education. With the right support, students can thrive in the SMAW strand and build successful careers.

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